At Duke, neuroscientists study the brain through music. And performance brings coding to life for computer engineers.

Our university has always thrived on a balance of innovation and tradition. The arts at Duke are no different. We offer robust training in theater, dance, music, and the visual arts. But art also flourishes here at creative intersections, converging with medicine, mathematics, theology, and engineering.

This arts-rich education opens doors to new ways of thinking and inspires spirited collaboration. With the support of alumni and friends, we can ensure that the arts remain an essential part of a Duke education.
The Interface of Performance and Technology

Thomas F. DeFrantz is more than a professor. To his students, he is a fellow artist. He works alongside them to explore the symbiotic relationship between art and engineering. DeFrantz is one of many Duke faculty members integrating the arts with other disciplines.

The professor of African and African American studies and dance co-teaches “Live Processing and Live Art: Performance and Technology” with Martin Brooke, a professor of electrical and computer engineering. They teach students to create innovative technology that is functional and enhances the human experience. For example, students have coded computer-vision cameras that let dancers manipulate music by moving their hands or feet.

The course is part of Bass Connections, an initiative that gives students the chance to tackle complex problems in research teams alongside faculty, other students from across Duke, and industry partners.

“Professor DeFrantz helped me push the boundaries of where software could go,” says Master of Engineering Management student Thomas Klebanoff. As a Pratt Research Fellow, Thomas worked closely with DeFrantz to create software for “Live Processing and Live Art” students to use in their projects.

DeFrantz inspired Thomas to launch a programming start-up that will address efficiency challenges in the music production industry. “Even writing code is an art,” says Thomas.
OUR STUDENTS

The Play’s the Thing

Emily Levinstone ’17 decided on a whim to audition for Duke’s mainstage play, The Perfect Detonator. She ended up stealing the show playing several female and male characters with a Russian accent.

It was her first experience with non-musical theater. “Acting on stage was nerve-racking but it also felt right, like I was doing something I loved,” says Emily. “I can’t imagine a better feeling than that.”

Emily, a trained opera singer, has since developed a passion for theater at Duke. “The professors genuinely care about my growth as an artist and a person,” she says. When the Austin-based theatre collective, Rude Mechanicals, spent time on campus as visiting artists, Emily was inspired by their experimental methods. She has since formed a friendship with Shawn Sides, one of the group’s co-producing artistic directors. “It’s like sitting down with Meryl Streep...that’s how much of a hero she is to me!”

“My friends and I would like to start a collaborative theater company in the future,” says Emily. “I’m so grateful to Duke for introducing me to a career path I’m excited to explore.”

Students like Emily are coming to Duke because of the depth and breadth of its arts programs. In fact, three times as many students are submitting art portfolios, as compared to 10 years ago.

Your gift can support our art students, departments, and programs while making creative expression an integral part of the Duke experience.

Our Mission

The arts play a critical role in the education and personal development of all students. We are committed to growing an expansive arts culture at Duke, providing students, faculty, and artists robust engagement across disciplines. Sustained and focused engagement in the arts fosters creative and critical thinking, collaboration, emotional sophistication, and proficiency in tackling complex projects.
Your endowed gift of $100,000 or more can bring world-class visiting artists to Duke.

Your gift of $75,000 or more can name a space in the new Duke Arts Center—a home to visiting artists of all kinds.

Making Music Together

“It is amazing to hear professional artists perform my work,” says Scott Lee, a Ph.D. student in composition.

For two years, the new music sextet, yMusic, worked closely with Scott and other doctoral students on developing new compositions and arrangements—from first sketches through final drafts. To culminate the residency, they performed the students’ works over a series of concerts presented by Duke Performances.

yMusic are among more than 40 artists-in-residence that have visited Duke since 2006.

“My engagement with yMusic resulted in other exciting opportunities, such as Ben Folds—a multi-platinum singer-songwriter and record producer—playing my arrangement on his tour,” says Scott. Recently, Scott won the 2015 ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers Award for a piece he wrote for other Duke artists-in-residence, the Da Capo Chamber Players.

His is just one story of how visiting artists have opened remarkable doors for Duke students.

Ph.D. student and composer Scott Lee
PRESENTERS

Art for Everyone

You tell your story every day. When you post a video on YouTube or snap a picture on Instagram, you document your life.

“Documentary used to be a niche art form,” says Wesley Hogan, director of Duke’s Center for Documentary Studies (CDS). “Now, because of the smartphone age, everyone can be a documentarian. At CDS, we teach people how to go deeper, to create meaningful work that opens up new directions in how the world is understood and perceived.”

One of CDS’s goals is to increase the diversity of voices in documentary arts. For example, in the course “Children and the Experience of Illness,” undergraduates teach children living with life-threatening diseases how to use words, illustrations, and a camera to document their illness. “This gives patients control after they’ve lost so much of it,” says Hogan. The experience also opens the eyes of future practitioners. “Young doctors who took the class ten years ago have told us how monumental it was for them.”

Like CDS, Duke Performances and the Nasher Museum of Art collaborate with Duke faculty and departments to give students remarkable access to the creative process.

They also engage the community while contributing to their fields on the world’s stage—originating exhibitions, curating performances, and commissioning new work. CDS’s Full Frame Documentary Film Festival attracts 12,000 audience members each year. Duke Performances offers an expansive array of over 70 performances annually, and nearly 1 million people from 66 countries have visited the Nasher since 2005. These presenters have put Duke and Durham on the map as the cultural hub of our region.

Your endowed gift of $100,000 or more can help fund performances, exhibitions, and educational programs of the highest quality.
Three times more prospective students are submitting art portfolios, as compared to 10 years ago.

- 6 majors
- 8 minors
- 2 certificates
- 2 Ph.D. programs
- 1 Master of Fine Arts
- 40 artists-in-residence have visited Duke since 2006
- 75 different student arts organizations are active across campus
- 250+ arts courses

“Artists at Duke are not ‘just’ artists but engineers, neurobiologists, political scientists, and more—that’s the special thing we do here. We are preparing students for the future—to be active and engaged, to aspire for excellence, to learn together in groups. The arts are central to that learning.”

Duke University President Richard H. Brodhead